

FACULTÉ DES LETTRES DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE PARIS

THE PREFACES OF HENRY JAMES

THÈSE COMPLÉMENTAIRE POUR LE DOCTORAT ÈS LETTRES

PRÉSENTÉE

par **Leon EDEL**

M. A., McGill University, Montréal

PARIS

JOUVE & C^{ie}, EDITEURS

15, RUE RACINE, 15

1931

THÈSE
POUR
LE DOCTORAT



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HENRY JAMES
(1912)

*From a dry point by Ben Karp
after the camera portrait by
Hoppé.*

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La Faculté n'entend donner aucune approbation ni improbation aux opinions émises dans les thèses ; ces opinions doivent être considérées comme propres à leurs auteurs.



To Sarah and Louis Rapkine.

NOTE

I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness to M. Louis Cazamian, professor of English Literature and Civilisation at the University of Paris, who directed me in the present work, and whose help and fine critical perception proved at all times highly invaluable. I am indebted also to Mr Henry James, nephew of the novelist, who readily replied to the various questions I had occasion to put to him, and who accorded me permission to reproduce the unpublished letter given in the appendix ; and to Mr Paul Lemperly, of Lakewood, Ohio, the well-known Henry James collector, who was kind enough to put the letter at my disposal. And finally, I should like to thank Miss Theodora Bosanquet, Henry James's amanuensis, whose help on more than one occasion in connection with this and other work has permitted me to round out my researches in a fashion that would have been, otherwise, impossible.

L. E.

FOREWORD

The present essay is an attempt to give an exposition of Henry James's theories and methods in fiction as contained in the prefaces which he wrote for the definitive edition of his novels and tales. It does not purport to discuss Henry James's theories of fiction in general. It is written, simply, with the idea that the prefaces in their original form, loose, haphazard, filled with vague reminiscence, present many difficulties to the reader of James, and that some brief summary of his outstanding points of view seems necessary. If I have erred on the expository side, edging away from the critical, it was because I felt that as far as possible James should be allowed to speak for himself. His attitude towards his art was so personal, his methods, his practice so individual, that any other approach would have been, it seems to me, harmful to James's own intentions and ideas. « I had often urged Henry James to let one of his friends... detach from those packed pages, » Mrs Wharton tells us (1) « and place in proper sequence, the

1. « Henry James in his Letters ». *Quarterly Review*, July 1920.

chief passages on the art of fiction. The idea interested him, and should still be carried out... »

It would be presumptuous of me to assert that the idea is here fully carried out : but I hope that I have given some brief sketch of the outstanding aspects of James's craft as he himself saw it. To have gone beyond that would have been to pass into foreign ground — ground upon which I hope at some future date to venture.

LEON EDEL.

Paris, 1931.

1

Introduction

THE PREFACES OF HENRY JAMES

I

« Sally is greatly interested just now in the introductions to his old novels which our dear Henry James is writing », wrote Charles Eliot Norton to Sir Philip Burne-Jones on March 7, 1908. « I confess to finding his recent work not merely enigmatic in style but more enigmatic in character when compared with the ideals which his own nature suggests » (1).

Norton's remark was decidedly in the fashion of the period : a period when everyone was finding James's work enigmatic, over-subtle, analytic... But, in reality, no one was more perturbed or disconcerted in the whole matter than Henry James himself. His books had never sold well (save the ever-popular *Daisy Miller*) and to be recognized as an unsuccessful artist in the market, while more than ever conscious of his literary powers, was profoundly disturbing to him. He had tried to win success in the theatre and had failed (2) : and now

1. Sara Norton and M. A. De Wolfe Howe, *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*. Boston and New York, 1913, pp. 395-396.

2. Edel, Leon, *Henry James : Les Années Dramatiques*. Paris, 1931.

from his retreat in Rye he was turning out novel after novel, each one going the way of its predecessors — a small sale, a confused criticism, and stupid letters from friends asking for explanations.

When James decided to issue a definitive edition of his works it seemed to him that some such effort might, to a degree, retrieve lost ground. In writing the prefaces to the edition he took the attitude of the misunderstood author who wishes to explain what he has tried to do, and why. His friends and admirers expected an account of intimate experiences, anecdotes, gossip. They were disappointed : reminiscence soon became criticism, and criticism became theory — Henry James gave, in short, a complete explanation of the methods he had formulated for himself in the creation of his novels.

The prefaces were, in a way, an urbane, a dignified protest against unperceiving criticism. « Mine was in short the love that killed », remarks the narrator in James's short story, *The Next Time*, « for my subtlety... produced no tremor of the public tail (1). » « There's an idea in my work without which I wouldn't have given a straw for the whole job. I ought to leave that to somebody else to say : but that nobody does say it is precisely what we're talking about (2) », Hugh Vereker, the misunderstood author, tells the narrator in *The*

1. Vol. XX, Macmillan Edition, p. 144.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

Figure in the Carpet. No one had said for James what he wanted to be said : (« Few people could say nice things about his books that didn't seem to him rather stupid praise », observes Henry James, the novelist's nephew) (1), and so now he said it himself, said it with great firmness, placing in the hands of the readers and critics the key to his work.

Very few have ventured to place the key in the lock, and open the door.

II

James wrote the prefaces, we have remarked, feeling that he was a misunderstood author. « His books were so little read in America », Thomas Beer tells us, « that he could be mentioned as « the late Henry James » in 1898 at a public banquet without exciting laughter (2) ». « The worst thing in our time about American taste is the way it treats James. I believe he would not be read in America at all if it were not for his European vogue », John Hay wrote to W. D. Howells on December 20, 1882 (3). « He was curious about conditions of authorship in America », Hamlin Garland relates of James, describing a visit to Lamb

1. From a memorandum to the author by Mr Henry James.

2. *Stephen Crane*, New York, 1927.

3. Thayer, William Roscoe, *The Life and Letters of John Hay*, vol. I, p. 444.

House. « He wanted to know more of the men whose books sold so enormously. He was amazed at my statement of the money certain writers made (1) »

There is no doubt that some element of James's preoccupation with the question of success, a question which troubled him throughout the 1890's (2), motivated his attitude towards the definitive edition. But there was one other element — and this was James's realization that the emphasis which he put on « form » was not appreciated. Criticism spoke of his books, but ignored their form, ignored what to James was all-important. Here he was constructing his novels with « centres », « lights », « reflectors » — building up pictures and scenes, planning every step, throwing his light just where it seemed to him it would reveal most — but no one seemed to care, and only a few showed themselves genuinely capable of understanding what it was all about. James finally embraced the opportunity to explain it himself in the prefaces. He failed, for few read them ; and the edition itself did not attract the attention he had expected.

III

Some understanding of the man who wrote the prefaces is essential. They were written by an

1. « Roadside Meetings », *Bookman*, July 1930.

2. Edel, Leon, *Henry James : Les Années Dramatiques*. Paris, 1931, chapter VII.

ageing novelist, in his sixties, his best work done, examining his life and his work in the light of his maturity. « Remembrance for me is, thank heaven, a great romance », James wrote to Arthur Christopher Benson on February 24, 1895 (1). And in these pages, filled indeed with the remembrance of a good many things past — almost Proustian at moments in their attention to fine sensation, to light, colour and atmosphere — we are given the ripe fruit of a life-time of sincere and consistently directed effort. The prefaces possess the same serenity, the same air of tranquillity and quiet moving tone (in their own way) as Robert Bridges' *Testament of Beauty*. They constitute, in fact, Henry James's testament.

Into their creation went years of literary effort and experience : experience and observation of life. « Experience », James wrote in his essay on *The Art of Fiction* (2) « is never limited, and it is never complete ; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind... » James's experience in particular, outwardly bare and simple, is composed of such silken threads, filled with delicate vibrations and reverberations. From earliest child-

1. *Henry James : Letters to A. C. Benson and Auguste Monod*, edited by E. F. Benson. London, 1930, p. 5.

2. *Partial Portraits*, p. 388.

hood a love of art, literature, the theatre, had been nourished and cultivated in him. He had been brought to Europe : for in 1849 Henry James the elder had written to Emerson, « ...considering with much pity our four stout boys, who have no play-room within doors and import shocking bad manners from the street, we gravely ponder whether it wouldn't be better to go abroad for a few years with them, allowing them to absorb French and German and get such a sensuous education as they can't get here (1) ». The sensuous education had been given them : and continued travel in Europe fostered in James's alert sensibility a rare appreciation for the « European scene », gave James his international mind. « Henry James est un écrivain difficile pour les lecteurs anglais, car il est Américain ; et difficile aussi pour les Américains, parce qu'il est Européen ; et je ne sais s'il est d'ailleurs « possible » pour d'autres lecteurs quels qu'ils soient », observes T. S. Eliot (2). This is the price, it may be supposed, James paid for his international mind.

To this American-European mind from the earliest days « form » in literature had appeared as of the highest importance. « We seem to have been presently always together », Howells is speaking of the Cambridge days when the young Henry was

1. *Notes of a Son and Brother*, p. 183.

2. « Lettre d'Angleterre », *La Nouvelle Revue française*, November 1923.

publishing his first efforts in the *Atlantic Monthly*, « and always talking of methods of fiction, whether we walked the streets by day or night, or we sat together reading our stuff to each other (1) ». That was the young Henry. « He was full of talk », A. C. Benson wrote in his diary on January 17, 1900, after visiting the mature novelist at Rye, « though he looked weary, often passing his hand over his eyes ; but he refined and defined, was intricate, magniloquent, rhetorical, humorous, not so much like a talker, but like a writer repeating his technical processes aloud — like a savant working out a problem... » (2). (Here already were the germs of the prefaces.) The form, the manner, the *doing* in literary creation always pre-occupied James : in the end it became almost an obsession. « Form alone *takes*, and holds and preserves », James could write at the end to Hugh Walpole (3). « It is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance, for our consideration and application of these things, and I know of no substitute what ever for the force and beauty of its process (4). » The process : *that* became all-essential to James. « There is nothing so deplorable as a work of art with a *leak* in its interest ; and there is no such leak of interest as through commonness of form (5). »

1. *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells*.

2. *The Diary of Arthur Christopher Benson*. London, 1926, p. 47.

3. *Letters*, vol. II, p. 237.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 490.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

« I am not sure that you « go in » for form as much as I like to see it gone in for », he writes A. C. Benson (1). « I could sometimes wish you a little *harder*, in form ...art should be as hard as nails », he remarks to him on another occasion (2). « Be as melancholy as you like — but try to be as perfect an artifex, for there is always glee in that and it is the best resistance to fate » (3). Wherever we turn we find James discussing form. Process, form, manner — James spoke of these matters all his life — he had heard them discussed by the *naturalistes* in Paris, had discussed them himself on innumerable occasions with Paul Bourget, Edith Wharton, Percy Lubbock — and spoke of them at great length in the prefaces. If we would like to know best of all in what spirit he approached them we must read James's letter to Hugh Walpole (4). « We must know, as much as possible, in our beautiful art, yours and mine, what we are talking about — and the only way to know is to have lived and loved and cursed and floundered and enjoyed and suffered. » James wanted to know as much as possible about his art : and in the prefaces he is the scholar who, having learned, explains and clarifies — he is the only real scholar in the art of fiction, says Mr Lubbock — and it is James the scholar we are to examine here.

1. *Henry James : Letters to A. C. Benson and Auguste Monod*, p. 1.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

3. *Vide supra* (1).

4. *Letters*, vol. II, p. 323.

11

Writing the Préfaces

I

In 1904 Henry James, after an absence of more than twenty years, re-visited America. For ten years he had been living in the quiet of Rye, in Sussex, at his country retreat, Lamb House, where he had written the last great novels of his old age. And now, emerging from the rural English scene, he found himself in New York, no longer the city of his birth, of his childhood and youth, no longer the New-York of *Washington Square* : but a huge, all-absorbing, all-embracing metropolis. Mingled with the new impressions which came upon him from every side were memories of a childhood almost forgotten, of old friendships, scenes of another, a most distant period. The year he spent exploring the length and breadth of the United States, as he had never explored it before, was rich in values. When he returned to Lamb House in August 1905 he had had a surfeit of impressions, as the thickly packed *American Scene* (the second volume of which he was never to write) reveals.

While in New York he completed arrangements for the publication of a definitive edition of his works, and once the volume of American impres-

sions was written he turned to the difficult task of preparing this edition. For some authors such an undertaking would present few problems — the grouping of one's past labours, the rejection of the least satisfactory, the writing, perhaps, of a few casual prefaces. But not so with scrupulous, painstaking, fastidious Henry James ... the definitive edition was to be his legacy to posterity and he felt that he had an important legacy to bequeath. It required days of laborious effort, of re-writing and re-arrangement : his « uncanny brood », he felt, needed tidying ; there were imperfections to be ironed out, emendations to be made, early works to be raised to the level of his mature, critical, exigent taste : there were faces to be washed, there was hair to be combed and there was dust to be removed (1)... « The act of revision, the act of seeing it again, caused whatever I looked at on any page to flower before me as into the only terms that honourably expressed it (2) ». He tells us that he had « nowhere scrupled to re-write a sentence or a passage on judging it susceptible of a better turn », always with a view to a possible amendment of form and enhancement of meaning (3). As for the earliest works one either rendered them into « the better literary manners » (4) of the later books, or one excluded them. No one could have

1. Vol. XXIII, *The Golden Bowl*, p. xvi.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Vol. I, *Roderick Hudson*, p. xiii.

4. *Vide supra* (1).

been more critical of his work than James, And as he read and re-read, the experience of turning back to things long completed produced for him « more kinds of interest and emotion » (1) than he was able to express.

As these memories were awakened, and as, reading between the lines, he recovered old sights and sounds, old moments when his creative faculty had flourished in the principal cities of Europe in which he, the passionate pilgrim, had worked, it seemed to him, that he might place some of them on record. How they thronged upon him, these memories... « it was strange how slight a thing a mere handful of pages of light persistent prose » (2) could act upon him in this fashion : recall the Paris of the 1870's in which he had written *The American*, the Venetian days where in an old *palazzo* he had woven some of his best stories, and the early weeks in London when the life of the great city had made him experience a thousand emotions of one kind and another. He yielded to the temptation of calling up old memories and projected a series of prefaces which were to be affixed to the various volumes of the edition. There was, James observed, the story of one's hero, and then, « thanks to the intimate connexion of things », the story of one's story itself (3)... James may have

1. Vol. I, *Roderick Hudson*, p. v.

2. Vol. XIV, *Lady Barbarina*, etc., preface.

3. Vol. XXI, *The Ambassadors*, p. x.

intended writing many reminiscences, but he soon wandered from his autobiographical intentions and « the story of one's story » proved to be a detailed, haphazard, quite loose and yet quite complete exposition of Henry James's art in fiction. It exposed for those who were interested, the texture of his books, his purpose, the « method at the heart of the madness » (1).

« To read his own books », observes Mr Lubbock, « was an entirely new amusement to him... he came back now to his early novels with a perfectly detached critical curiosity... in the prefaces to the various volumes he wrote what became in the end a complete exposition of his theory of the art of fiction, intertwined with the memories of past labour that he found everywhere in the much-forgotten pages (2). »

II

Editing the collected works was not an easy task, as we have observed. Long before he had finished he was thoroughly fatigued by the undertaking. « The Nightmare of the Edition (of my works !) is the real *mot de l'Enigme* of all my long gaps and delinquencies these many months past, » James wrote Howells (3), « — my terror of not keeping sufficiently ahead in doing my part of

1. Vol. I, *Roderick Hudson*, preface.

2. *Letters*, vol. II, p. 4.

3. *Letters*, vol. II, pp. 98-99, p. 102.

it (all the revising, re-writing, retouching, Preface-making and proof-correcting) has so paralysed me — as a panic fear — that I have let other decencies go to the wall. The printers and publishers tread on my heels, and I feel their hot breath behind me — whereby I keep *at* it in order not to be overtaken. Fortunately I have kept at it so that I am almost out of the wood, and the next very few weeks or so will completely lay the spectre.» He wrote in this vein on April 3, 1908 : and by August the effort had thoroughly exhausted him. He had been far more exuberant in an earlier letter to Grace Norton « ... the real tussle is in writing the Prefaces (to each volume or book) which are to be long — very long ! — and loquacious — and competent perhaps to *pousser à la vente*. The Edition is to be of 23 volumes and there are to be some 15 Prefaces (as some of the books are in two) and twenty-three lovely frontispieces — all of which I have this winter very ingeniously called into being ; so that *they* at least only await « process » reproduction. The prefaces, as I say, are difficult to do — but I have found them of a jolly interest ; and though I'm not going to let you read one of the fictions themselves over I shall expect you to read all the said Introductions » (1).

The prefaces were certainly not an easy matter, more difficult perhaps, than the revision of the

1. *Letters*, vol. II, p. 70.

early novels. He worked, Miss Bosanquet tells us in *Henry James at Work*, from half-past ten to half-past one every morning dictating them, over a long period. « Henry James », she observes elsewhere, « simply began dictating without any previous draft, and went on till he came to the end. He had very little hesitation about what he wanted to say » (1).

« My actual attitude about the *Lucubrations* », James wrote Howells again on August 17, 1908, « is almost only, and quite inevitably, that they make, to me, for weariness ; by reason of their number and extent — I've now but a couple more to write. This staleness of sensibility in connection with them, blocks out for the hour every aspect but that of their being all done, and of their perhaps helping the Edition to sell two or three copies more ! They will have represented much labour to this latter end — though in that they will have differed indeed from no other of their fellow-manifestations (in general) whatever ; and the resemblance will be even increased if the two or three copies *don't*, in the form of an extra figure or two, mingle with my withered laurels. They are a sort of plea for Criticism, for Discrimination, for Appreciation on other than infantile lines — as against the so-almost universal Anglo-Saxon absence of these things ; which tends so, in our gene-

1. From a memorandum supplied by Miss Bosanquet.

ral trade, it seems to me, to break the heart. However, I am afraid I'm too sick of the mere doing of them, and of the general strain of the effort to avoid the deadly danger of repetition, to say much to the purpose about them. They ought, collected together, none the less, to form a sort of comprehensive manual or *vade-mecum* for aspirants in our arduous profession. Still, it will be long before I shall want to collect them together, for that purpose and furnish *them* with a final preface. I've done with prefaces for ever (1). »

To which Howells later replied : « You have done a lot of good work, but nothing better than the last half of each of those prefaces ; and I think the public will understand from them what I tried to note to you, that miserable hot afternoon when we sat glued to our chairs here : the fact, namely, that you have imagined your fiction, as a whole, and better fulfilled a conscious intention in it than any of your contemporaries. It took courage to do those introductions, and a toil as great, but how you must have liked doing them — or having done them (2). » Whatever we may say of Howells' own work we must accept with the greatest respect what he said about Henry James. He was one of the few who realized that he sat before the greatest of his contemporaries.

1. *Letters*, vol. II, p. 102.

2. *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells*, vol. II, p. 256.

III

We might pause here a moment to speak of the literary charm of the prefaces, how rich they are in images of Europe, rich in conveying James's extraordinary «sense of the past». He had lingered on many occasions in Paris, in Rome, in Venice, — he had lived for years in a fast-changing London. And now, sitting in the quiet of Rye, his mind wandered back over a long stretch of years and reached out, re-capturing old sounds, old moods, the hum and chatter of old cities, the very changes of light and colour which enveloped them. For James's sensitive recording mind clung to these memories and poured them forth now as loosely and as freely as it was to pour them forth later in the autobiographical volumes.

«I had rooms on Riva Schiavoni, at the top of a house near the passage leading off to San Zaccaria », he tells us in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, «the waterside life, the wondrous lagoon spread before me, and the ceaseless human chatter of Venice came in at my windows, to which I seem to myself to have been constantly driven, in the fruitless fidget of composition, as if to see whether, out in the blue channel, the ship of some right suggestion, of some better phrase of the next happy twist of my subject, the next true touch for my canvas, mightn't come into sight... There are

pages of the book which, in the reading over, have seemed to make me see again the bristling curve of the wide Riva, the large colour-spots of the balconied houses and the repeated undulation of the little hunchbacked bridges, marked by the rise and drop again, with the wave, of foreshortened clicking pedestrians. »

He is in Paris, writing *The American*. « I saw from one day to another my particular cluster of circumstances, with the life of the splendid city playing up in it like a flashing fountain in a marble basin. » He hears the light click of the cab-horse on clear asphalt, the city about him provides the rich Parisian harmony he requires. He is in Florence, in a high, charming, shabby old room, in May and June of 1874, over-looking Piazza Santa Maria Novella, and the Florentine beauties impress themselves on him as he writes *Roderick Hudson*. He is in London : and in « the good fog-filtered Kensington mornings » is writing *The Tragic Muse*. « I recall with this confirmed infatuation of retrospect that through the mild perceptions I here glance at there struck for *The Tragic Muse* the first hour of a season of no small subjective felicity ; lighted mainly, I seem to see, by a wide west window that, high aloft, looked over near and far London sunsets, a half-grey, half-flushed expanse of London life. »

Later he takes his novel to Paris. « Re-reading the last chapters of *The Tragic Muse* I catch again

the very odour of Paris, which comes up in the rich rumble of the Rue de la Paix — with which my room itself, for that matter, seems impregnated — and which hangs for reminiscence about the embarrassed effort to « finish » not ignobly, within my already exceeded limits ; an effort prolonged each day to those late afternoon hours during which the tone of the terrible city seemed to deepen about one to an effect strangely composed at once of the auspicious and the fatal. »

They play in and out of his prefaces, these pictures, much as sunlight plays among trees, giving to them a particular richness of tone, and a profounder depth, where the shadows fall. He saw these images vividly, perhaps, because he was looking back upon them : for he tells us that in their presence the impression was too immediate to be appreciated fully. « I have ever, in general, found it difficult to write of places under too immediate an impression — the impression that prevents standing off and allows neither space nor time for perspective. The image has had for the most part to be dim if the reflexion was to be, as is proper for a reflexion, both sharp and quiet : one has a horror, I think, artistically, of agitated reflexions. »

Therein lies the great value of the prefaces : they are the leisurely, quiet utterances of a man who, in his old age, holds his craft in his hand and surveys it with detachment. There is nothing to ruffle

their calm surface ; and in their fine maturity we have the reflexion of Henry James, the Master (as one might speak of him thinking of *The Lesson of the Master*) — the Henry James of the later years and the « later manner », a calm, noble, austere figure : a great artist, and a great man.

III

The Art of Fiction

I

James had done with prefaces forever, he had written Howells, but he left sixteen curious, extremely personal and extremely valuable documents relative to the craft of fiction. It was not (at least to all appearances) a case of the author defending his work : he was elaborating, explaining, defining... always bringing to bear on it a subtle, complex, analytic mind, which because of its complexity (and the difficulties of James's later style) makes the task of separating reminiscence from discussion of method difficult.

We see in the prefaces, more than elsewhere, how consciously James approached the art of fiction. He was no longer, had never been, the simple story-teller, a narrator like Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, all the old English novelists. He was the novelist conscious of form, of artifice, of manner, conscious of those problems of art he had heard discussed in the far-off Parisian days by the men who came to Pauline Viardot's home, where the great Turgenev scrambled about on all fours playing charades, and to the home of Flaubert, — the great Turgenev himself, and the author of *Madame Bovary*, and the puzzling Zola, the curious

de Maupassant, and Daudet, and Edmond de Goncourt and the others...

A few years after he met these men (in 1884) James summed up his attitude towards his art in a very remarkable essay, *The Art of Fiction*, published in the September number of *Longman's Magazine*. He could write, now, with authority, for in the 1880's the silken-bearded American enjoyed the greatest popularity of his career both in England and America. He was the much-discussed author of *Daisy Miller*. He had discovered the « international situation » and had pleased his audience (his success was to be of short duration). He had written *Roderick Hudson*, *The American*, *The Portrait of a Lady*. He was read and appreciated ; he moved with ease in the best circles in London. The essay written at this period, when he felt sure of his craft, is extremely illuminating. For the next thirty years he was to adhere to the ideas propounded in it. They became larger perhaps, certainly more mature, but underwent no essential changes. Once he had emerged from his apprenticeship (1) James understood exactly how he wanted to create his fiction : he approached it with a full consciousness of the possibilities and limitations of the form. And when, finally, he was able to look back on his own work, in his prefaces, he

1. For an interesting examination of James's apprenticeship see *The Early Development of Henry James* by Dr C. P. Kelley, Urbana, Ill., 1930.

demonstrated conclusively that he had proceeded in a straight line, had, to put it generally and broadly, practised what he had on innumerable occasions preached.

The Art of Fiction was a reply to a lecture delivered by Walter Besant at the Royal Institution on the same subject. Fiction, James pointed out, was no longer the loose, unbridled creature of the earlier novelists : one could no longer be satisfied with the current conception that « a novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that our only business with it could be to swallow it » (1). The discussions of its *raison d'être* which had arisen he welcomed, for art thrived, he observed, on discussion, experiment, curiosity, variety of attempt, the exchange of views and comparison of standpoints. The time had come for fiction to take itself seriously if it wanted the public to take it so. The idea was still latent in the public mind that the novel was « make-believe ». Henry James objected vigorously. « The only reason for the existence of a novel » he wrote « is that it does attempt to represent life (2). » The novelist and the painter drew from the same source ; and even as the picture was reality so the novel was history. It *was* life itself. (And James digressed here to attack Trollope for reminding his readers on one occasion that they were in a fictive world « making-believe » —

1. James included the essay in *Partial Portraits*. See, p. 376.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 378.

such a betrayal seemed to him « a terrible crime »).

It had never occurred to a good many people that a novel ought to be artistic : they to whom it seemed that literature should be either instructive or amusing, and that the search for form might be detrimental to both. They wanted « happy endings » as if novels were good dinners which terminated with a dessert ; they insisted on homely scenes, pleasant subjects, cheerful remarks... in short they would agree that the « artistic » idea would spoil their fun.

« A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life (1). » With this for his point of departure James took issue with Besant on one question above all — Besant had tried to say too definitely beforehand what sort of an affair the good novel should be. If one accepted James's definition one had to allow for freedom to feel and to say : and if one made this allowance one had to reject Besant's claim. The novelist could accept no general limitations ; he was at liberty to range about as he chose, free to impose limitations on himself... the form was to be appreciated after the fact : the execution belonged to the author alone. « The advantage, the luxury, as well as the torment and responsibility of the novelist, is that there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant — no limit to his possible

1. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes (1). » The painter could teach the rudiments of his practice : but the novelist at best could say to his pupil : « Ah well, you must do it as you can. »

Besant had remarked that a young lady brought up in a quiet country village should avoid descriptions of garrison life. James replied that the young lady had merely to be « a damsel upon whom nothing is lost » (2) to make it unfair to declare to her that she shall have nothing to say about the military. One sought always the sense of reality, but one could not be given the recipe for calling that sense into being. He was prepared to tell the novice to write from experience, but he felt that he could not do so without adding : « Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost (3). »

The illusion of life — to produce that the novelist had to determine for himself his method, study and cultivate it... this was the beginning and the end of his art, his inspiration, his despair, his reward, his torment, his delight (4). The novelist cannot take too many notes, he cannot take enough, and no one can teach him how to take them. He must learn to delineate character, to multiply incident, to describe, to construct dialogue... « a novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any

1. *Ibid.*, p. 385.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 388.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 390.

4. *Ibid.*

other organism... (1). » To what good the distinctions between novel of incident and novel of character : there are bad novels and good novels as there are bad pictures and good pictures — and any other distinctions are clumsy and useless. Character is but the determination of incident : incident is but the illustration of character...

It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look out at you in a certain way ; or if it be not an incident I think it will be hard to say what it is. At the same time it is an expression of character. If you say you don't see it (character in *that* — *allons donc* !) this is exactly what the artist who has reasons of his own for thinking he *does* see it undertakes to show you (2).

The only point of a novel open to contention was the execution : questions of morality and didacticism were quite irrelevant it seemed to James. « We are discussing the Art of Fiction ; questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution ; questions of morality are quite another affair (3). » If one respected the freedom of the artist, one had to allow him first his freedom of choice : one had to grant him his starting point. « I may not care for your idea at all », said James, « I may think it silly, or stale, or unclean ; in which case I wash my hands of you altogether... As people feel life, so will they feel the art that is

1. *Ibid.*, p. 392.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 393.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 405.

most closely related to it » (1). One had one's own standard ; one could reject or accept — but one could not say to the writer that he was to take one thing, or to put aside another... Fiction was valid to James only when, while respecting form, it offered life *without* re-arrangement (2). Art was selective, but it had to be inclusive as well.

For many people art means rose-coloured windowpanes and selection means picking a bouquet for Mrs Grundy. They will tell you glibly that artistic considerations have nothing to do with the disagreeable, with the ugly ; they will rattle off shallow commonplaces about the province of art and the limits of art till you are moved to some wonder in return as to the province and the limits of ignorance (3).

Complete freedom, then, for the artist, a capacity for receiving straight impressions, consciousness of form, were all-essential.

Besant had also remarked that a story must consist of « adventures », to which James replied that adventure had to be considered in its largest sense. It was an adventure for him to be writing the article « and for a Bostonian nymph to reject an English duke is an adventure only less stirring, I should say, than for an English duke to be rejected by a Bostonian nymph. I see dramas within dramas in that, and innumerable points of view. A psychological reason is ...an object adorably

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 396-397.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 398.

3. *Ibid.*

pictorial... There are few things more exciting to me, in short, than a psychological reason... » (1).

And finally the conscious moral purpose Besant had insisted upon... how could a picture be either moral or immoral ? You wish to paint a moral picture or carve a moral statue : will you not tell us how you would set about it ? (2). The moral question in fact did not enter into the discussion ; one could discuss, rather, the mind of the producer of the fiction, and be certain that, in proportion as the creative intelligence was fine, the novel, the picture, the statue would partake of the substance of beauty and truth. A *good* novel could not be the product of a superficial mind — that axiom could cover all the moral ground.

In short, Henry James, in speaking to the novice about the art of fiction, reminded him of the magnificence of the form, which offered such few restrictions and such innumerable opportunities. He insisted that sincerity was the first great requisite. All life belonged to the novelist, and it was his duty to refuse to be shut up into corners of it ; it was his duty to be disinterested in questions of optimism and pessimism ; he had rather to « try and catch the colour of life » ; *there* was the direction in which he was to exercise his talents. Writers so dissimilar as Dumas and Jane Austen, Dickens and Flaubert

1. *Ibid.*, p. 402.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 404.

had worked in the field with equal glory (1). And finally James urged : « Remember that your first duty is to be as complete as possible — to make as perfect a work ».

II

High ideals, these, and James perceived them very clearly. To the end he delighted in the freedom the novel gave him — and not one of the ideas uttered in the 1880's was ignored when a quarter of a century later he wrote the prefaces. He was singularly consistent throughout : and with the passing of time he attained a personal method, the execution of which, he had remarked, was the only ground upon which the novel could be discussed.

His prefaces represented « the continuity of an artist's endeavour, the growth of his whole operative consciousness » (2). The art of « representation » bristled for him with questions « the very terms of which are difficult to apply and appreciate » (3). But it was just this difficulty that he enjoyed. Difficulty was a major reason for his persistent attempts in the dramatic form, and it made the novel all the more dear to him « whatever makes it arduous, makes it, for our refreshment, infinite, causes the practice of it, with expe-

1. *Ibid.*, p. 408.

2. Vol. I, *Roderick Hudson*, p. vi.

3. *Ibid.*, p. v.

rience, to spread round us in a widening, not in a narrowing circle » (1). This experience had to organize, however, some system of observation for fear of losing its way.

It all depended, this matter of creating fiction, on the nature of the novelist's faculty on the one hand, and the nature of his experience on the other. « A complex of fine measurements » was required if a coherent picture was to be produced and to James neither Scott, nor Balzac, nor even the « coarse, comprehensive, prodigious Zola » for all their feeling and seeing and conceiving had committed themselves in this direction while at the same time plotting and planning and calculating (2). And it was just the man who *did* look in both directions who realized and achieved the greatest interest of his genius : for to James that greatest interest was not only in seeing life, but in the process of rendering it. *War and Peace*, *The Newcomes*, any of the novels of Dostoievsky, were for James « large loose baggy monsters » possessing « queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary » ... What could they mean artistically ? « There is life and life, and as waste is only life sacrificed and thereby prevented from « counting » I delight in a deep-breathing economy and an organic form (3). »

1. *Ibid.*, p. v.

2. Preface to *The American*.

3. Vol. VII, *The Tragic Muse*, p. vii.

The saving sanities « of the dramatic poet's always rather mad undertaking » were just these... the rigour of his artistic need to cultivate almost at any price variety of appearance and experiment, « to dissimulate likenesses, samenesses, stalenesses, by the infinite play of a form pretending to a life of its own » (1). What longest lived in the memory of a story-teller, in the memory of Henry James, after years of devotion to his craft, was not the variable question of « success » — of which he had enjoyed the minimum in its commonly accepted sense — but the « inveterate romance » of the labour.

It is this unerring consistency, the maturity of his views when he approached fiction, the manner in which he enlarged them as he grew older while maintaining the core of his belief, which marks out James from his contemporaries. To the end he adhered to his original idea of the novel as an organic form, intended to produce an illusion of life, demanding above all an air of reality, and a belief in the *doing* of the thing. It explains the whole art of Henry James ; it explains his repeated emphasis on form, it explains the strange asceticism of this great artist whose life was his art and his art his life, and who wrought with so much confidence, understanding, intelligence. He stands

1. Vol. XVIII, *Daisy Miller*, etc., p. xiv.

with Flaubert in his devotion to his craft, and his desire for perfection, and with Dostoievsky (though at an opposite emotional pole) in the profundity of his psychological analysis.

IV

The Origin of the Story

I

A discussion of the origin of the story is generally James's starting point in the analysis of his method in the prefaces. The first pin-prick of inspiration was for him a moment of the greatest delight and intensity (1). Those who knew James report that it was often their habit to relate to him some anecdote which seemed to them the suitable basis for a Jamesian story. Invariably the prelate-like head nodded in disapproval; invariably James was disinterested, only to snatch, later on, at a casual remark, the account of some apparently inconsequential incident, with an eagerness which clearly showed that for him *this* bristled with implications. When Arthur Christopher Benson met James at the Athenaeum some years before his death he asked him when the inception and design of a new book was formed. The aged author gave no satisfactory answer to this, except to roll his eyes, to wave his hand... he patted Benson on the knee and said : « It's all *about*, it's about — it's in the air — it, so to speak, follows me and dogs me (2). »

1. *Letters*, Introduction vol. I, pp. xix-xxi.

2. *The Diary of Arthur Christopher Benson*, London, 1926, p. 81.

It dogged a consciousness which from early childhood had acquired the habit of taking notes. If one was to be a teller of tales and to report with truth on the human scene, « it could be but because « notes » had been from the cradle the ineluctable consequence of one's greatest inward energy » (1). To take them was as natural to James as to perform any act; it became another sense with him — one couldn't simply *not* take them...

« Art deals with what we see, it must first contribute full-handed that ingredient; it plucks its material, otherwise expressed, in the garden of life — which material elsewhere grown is stale and uneatable », he tells us in the preface to *The Ambassadors* (2). The prefaces testify to the truth of this statement; we can follow James from story to story as he picks up the threads of their origin; we find him always plucking from the garden of life, always constructing around notes and observations indefatigably taken. The moment the *idea* entered his complex mind it was submitted to a process, to selection — there arose then the problem, as we shall see later, of the telling of the story.

II

There had come to him, for instance, the idea for his early novel, *The American*... While he was

1. Vol. V, *The Princess Casamassima*, p. XXI.

2. Vol. XXI, p. IX.

riding one day in a Boston horse-car he found himself considering suddenly, with enthusiasm, the « theme » of a story — a robust American, in an aristocratic society, suffering at the hands of persons pretending to the highest possible civilisation. Once the bare situation had suggested itself, the question, the all-important question, was : « What would this American « do » in that predicament ? » And as he analyzed the various possibilities of his conduct, it seemed to him that he would have him hold his revenge against the persons who had made him suffer, and « cherish it and feel its sweetness », and in the act of forcing it home would sacrifice it in disgust. Here was a subject, an irony, based on the moral necessity of the American's « practical magnanimity », and it pleased James, it pleased him even when it worked itself out in blood-and-thunder melodrama, and made his novel for him « romantic, consistently, consummately, charmingly (1) ». With this situation arose the character of Christopher Newman ; his « germination » was a process James deemed untraceable... he had merely walked into the situation. (One might add, tracing the matter for James, that he was bound to walk into the situation, for James had more than once during his European travels noted the naive and robust American facing the complexities of « Europe »). Thereafter the story grew rapidly

1. See preface to *The American*, vol. II.

under his hands as he wrote in his rooms on the old Rue de Luxembourg, and heard the light click of the cab horses on the clear asphalt, and felt the life of splendid Paris playing up into his novel. He took his work to Etretat that summer, then to Bayonne, then to Saint-Germain-en-Laye, then to London in the autumn of 1876, only to return again to the Rive Gauche, where in a little Paris hotel, which made him think of the Maison Vauquer, he completed it.

There was *The Portrait of a Lady* which was built up around a detached personage, a lady James had had in mind for a long time. Here, with Turgenev, James felt the intensity of suggestion that may reside in the stray figure... For the figure moved, after all, in a definite world, and it was the novelist's task to reconstruct that world. This was what Turgenev had told him in the distant, happy Parisian days, when he came to see the ageing, bearded Russian, or when they sat in a café over a belated *déjeuner* until twilight, discussing their art. The story began for Turgenev with the vision of some person or persons hovering before him, soliciting him. He saw them vividly, and his task became one of imagining, inventing, selecting, piecing together the situations most useful and favorable to the people themselves, the complications they would be most likely to produce and to feel (1).

« To arrive at these things is to arrive at my

1. Vol. III, *The Portrait of a Lady*, pp. vii-viii

« story », and that's the way I look for it », Turgenev told James (1).

The result is that I'm often accused of not having story enough. I seem to myself to have as much as I need — to show my people, to exhibit their relations with each other, for that is all my measure. If I watch them long enough I see them come together, I see them *placed*, I see them engaged in this or that act and in this or that difficulty. How they look and move and speak and behave, always in the setting I have found for them, is my account of them — of which I dare say, alas, *que cela manque souvent d'architecture*. But I would rather, I think, have too little architecture than too much — when there's danger of its interfering with my measure of the truth. The French of course like more of it than I give — having by their own genius such a hand for it ; and indeed one must give all one can. As for the origin of one's wind blown germs themselves, who shall say, as you ask, where *they* come from ? We have to go too far back, too far behind, to say. Isn't it all we can say that they come from every quarter of heaven, that they are *there* at almost any turn of the road ? They accumulate and we are always picking them over, selecting among them. They are the breath of life — by which I mean that life, in its own way, breathes them upon us. They are so, in a manner prescribed and imposed — floated into our minds by the current of life. That reduces to imbecility the vain critic's general quarrel with one's subject, when he hasn't the wit to accept it. Will he point out then which other it should properly have been ? — his office being, essentially *to point out* ? *Il en serait bien embarrassé*. Ah, when he points out what I've done or failed to do with it, that's another matter : there he's on his ground. I give him up my 'architecture' as much as he will (2).

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

Here was « this beautiful genius » in the 1870's pouring doctrine into the ears of the younger Henry, so that he was later to recall with gratitude the words of the « admirable Russian ». And other echoes from the same source lingered with him unfadingly, long after Turgenev was dead, and Pauline Viardot's salon dispersed : the extraordinary Flaubert gone, and the genial Daudet and the perplexing Zola, and de Maupassant.

III

In citing Turgenev James was merely adding the weight of authority to what he had earlier expressed in the essay on fiction : morality was morality, and fiction was fiction, and the critic was not concerned with the morality or immorality of a subject. For James there was only one question : was a subject valid, was it genuine, was it sincere, was it the result of some direct impression or perception of life ? With this attitude, which was the fusion of all that he had heard in Paris, which had in it echoes of « art » discussions, and of the *tranche de vie* (1), James had first felt that his aesthetic of fiction was becoming firmly

1. It would be erroneous to create the impression that James accepted all that he heard from the older men in Paris as doctrine. The only man who held out anything to him was Turgenev. The others stimulated him — but on the whole he reacted against their ideas, their morality, their attitude towards art which was to him often narrow, egocentric, and lacking above all fresh air.

founded. And here indeed was the high value of the novel as a form, for while it preserved that form with closeness, in the hands of a master it possessed a blessed elasticity which allowed it « to range through all the differences of the individual relation to its general subject-matter, all the varieties of outlook on life, of disposition to reflect and project, created by conditions that are never the same from man to man (or, so far as that goes, from man to woman) but positively to appear more true to its character in proportion as it strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mould » (1).

The Portrait of a Lady, then, had originated with a vivid individual (she was probably modelled after Minny Temple, the young friend of Henry and William's youth, whose premature death left a deep impression on them both) — who had gradually become the conception for James, of a young woman confronting her destiny. Many young women do that, James told himself : and so the question he asked himself was how this slim image could become a « subject ». And James's own reply was : « Challenge any such problem with any intelligence and you immediately see how full it is of substance (2) ». That he achieved it is to be recognized in Isabel Archer, one of the most successful of his heroines. Whatever one may say of the con-

1. Vol. III, *Portrait of a Lady*, p. x.

2. *Ibid.*

duct he gives her, of the people who are placed around her, she remains a remarkable study, in spite of the fact that Rebecca West finds her « far too radiantly good for this world » (1). She is remarkable because, in the free play of her consciousness, a consciousness as limpid as crystal, in her level gaze at life, we are able to see with greater clarity that very world for which she is too good.

The Princess Casamassima sprang in a similar way from the stray figure, sprang for James literally out of the London pavement, in the person of young Hyacinth Robinson. During the first year of his long London residence, James had cultivated the habit of walking the streets of the city as he had walked them in Paris, in Rome, in fact everywhere in Europe. The novel was « the ripe round fruit of perambulation ». To walk through the dense streets, filled with humanity, with all the sound and life of a great city, was to receive many impressions, and these « worked and sought an issue » (2). All around were subjects and situations, character and history, tragedy and comedy... the idea came to James that nothing would be more interesting than to study some individual sensitive nature seeing London from the outside : watching the same public show, the same innumerable appearances. This individual was not to be the leisurely onlooker, able to participate or withdraw at will. He was to be

1. *Henry James*, London, 1916, p. 70.

2. Vol. V, *The Princess Casamassima*, p. v.

powerless, with every door of approach shut in his face, revolving around the life of London (the life of monied ease and comfort James knew) « at the most respectful of distances » (1). He enjoyed contemplating this, the puzzled Henry, for, as he himself admits in his preface, he was not to have a similar experience. For him there had been freedom and ease, knowledge and power, money, opportunity, satiety... « for one's self, all conveniently, there had been doors that opened — opened into light and warmth and cheer, into good and charming relations » (2). What of one who, seeking these things was denied them? James could not study the world of Hyacinth Robinson (and indeed his attempt in this direction fails in the book) but he could study the reflection of his own world in a sensitive mind such as Robinson's.

For James felt above all that his fiction was to be a record of experience — « our apprehension and our measure of what happens to us as social creatures — any intelligent report of which has to be based on that apprehension » (3). And young Hyacinth's experience was, contrary to that of many less endowed individuals, that of both « feeling » and « doing » deeply : the result being a state of bewilderment which it behoved him to render.

1. *Ibid.*, p. vi.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. viii.

IV

It is difficult for the literary artist to explain or to remember the origin of his work. The bare idea falling into a complex consciousness immediately begins to grow, is squeezed, pushed and altered, and takes on a thick moss-covering. We gain some insight into the creative process in a work such as Professor Lowes' *The Road to Xanadu* in which he leads us, to some extent, through the labyrinth of Coleridge's mind... we are dealing with the very complexity of thought itself, and of memory, and we can only bridge some of the moments, content ourselves often with casual measurements and estimates. With Henry James we are dealing with a consciousness so subtle that even casual measurements sometimes fail us.

And yet in the case of *The Tragic Muse* we are able to understand its origin clearly, even though James himself in the preface tells us that he failed to recover his «precious first moment of consciousness of the idea» (1). He did vaguely remember that from far back he had always wanted to give some dramatic picture of the «artist-life» and the «difficult terms on which it is at best secured and enjoyed» (2). He needed to go no further; thereafter the book would write itself, for he had

1. Vol. VII, *The Tragic Muse*, p. v.

2. *Ibid.*, p. x.

chosen the two arts (outside his own) which most interested him, painting and the drama. He was able to invest Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth with the background, the whole situation which their lives represented. He had haunted, in his early days, the studio of William Hunt, in Newport, and later the Parisian studios — and there had been the pre-Raphaelites, and Whistler and Sargent and Pennell and du Maurier. Nick Dormer's world was very close to James, and Miriam Rooth's even closer, for what institution had James studied with greater assiduity than the French theatre, the Maison de Molière — and what institution had he condemned more roundly than the English theatre of his time? He who had sat at the feet of Coquelin and Bernhardt, of Croizette, and Favart, and all the great nineteenth century actors and actresses of the Parisian stage (save Rachel, whom he had not been taken to see, he regretted, when he was brought, as a small boy, to Paris), could draw Miriam Rooth, could lift her from life. In this novel, more than elsewhere, we can see the author's own life reflected, reflected in Gabriel Nash, the writer, with his Jamesian opinions of drama and art, and in Peter Sherringham, with his burning interest in the theatre.

The Tragic Muse had been a slow growth, the ripe fruit of twenty years of European life: it had spread itself gradually over a large full canvas. Once he had completed it, James announced

that he would only do short things... « I am busy with the *short* — I have foresworn the long », he wrote to Stevenson on March 19, 1892 (1)... and he did for a number of years. He had taken, however, too many notes — the short eventually became an impossibility for him. *The Awkward Age* was begun as a brief tale, a small thing, but it became, James observed, a comparative monster. Originally it was a mere grain of subject matter : one of those concrete images in the « vast nursery, of sharp appeals » — London (2) — the study of female adolescence, the awkward age of daughters in fashionable households, when they begin to ask questions. From this general case he came to the particular, and wove the scenic novel, his technique profoundly influenced by five years of dramatic writing. It is a perfect example of James's later method, rigorously applied, and he prided himself on its « exemplary closeness » (3). *The Spoils of Poynton*, too, was begun as a short tale, and soon took on broad dimensions ; a stray suggestion, a wandering word, a small seed had inspired it. Someone had spoken during a Christmas dinner, of « such an odd matter as that a good lady in the north, always well looked on, was at daggers drawn with her only son, ever hitherto exemplary, over the ownership of the valuable furniture of a fine old

1. *Letters*, vol. I, p. 189.

2. Vol. IX, *The Awkward Age*, p. v.

3. *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

house accruing to the young man by his father's death » (1). James had become aware at once that he was inoculated, as it were, with the story. Its very virtue, this pin-prick of inspiration, was in its needle-like quality, the power to penetrate as finely as possible. It was anything but usual to have a good eye for a subject and it involved for James the realization that life was all inclusion and confusion, and art all discrimination and selection. For James there was an endless attraction in order and arrangement, an endless attraction above all in the question of the « method at the heart of the madness » (2). There was only, for the artist one logic in these things, one truth and one direction — the quarter in which the subject most completely expressed itself (3).

He seized then these « dust-blown particles », these red dramatic sparks which glowed for him at the core of his vision and he blew upon them until they « burned higher and clearer » (4). He found, for instance, in choosing his theme for *What Maisie Knew* (a study of the child of divorced parents in the strange moral world created by subsequent relationships) that it possessed a human quality which had always pleased him in a subject : the fact that the things which help can also be the things which hurt, that the face of a medal can

1. Vol. X, *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. v.

2. Vol. I, *Roderick Hudson*.

3. Vol. X, *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. vi.

4. Vol. XI, *What Maisie Knew*, p. vi.

be somebody's right and ease, and the other side somebody's pain and wrong (1). By placing the childish consciousness in a terribly mixed little world he felt that his theme assumed the greatest beauty, for there it would express and reflect the variety of the child's « values ». The story of another child, *The Pupil*, came to James from the casual account of a friend of his in a railway carriage in Italy, on a hot summer's day... « Here was more than enough for a summer's day even in old Italy — here was a thumping windfall (2) ». *In the Cage* grew from an interest in an individual consciousness, that of a young woman who works behind the post-office cage, handling telegrams and despatches. It was born of the author's « irrepressible and insatiable, his extravagant and immoral interest in personal character and in the « nature » of a mind, of almost any mind the heaving little sea of his subject may cast up » (3).

V

We must turn now to another — to perhaps the most important — aspect of the origin of the story as described in the prefaces of Henry James. Nearly all of his early work, and a good deal of the later, had its origin in his perception of the so-called

1. *Ibid.*, p. viii.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xv.

3. *Ibid.*, p. xx.

«international situation». James had known intimately what he called the «classic years of the great Americano-European legend» (1). He, the passionate pilgrim, an American in Europe, had soon become aware of the other pilgrims (many of them, however, «passionless») facing the complicated European scene. He had been led in this fashion, as we have seen, to *The American*, and to many of the early tales, and he returned to the situation in the last three novels. There was for James «no possibility of contrast in the human lot so great as that encountered as we turn back and forth between the distinctively American and the distinctively European outlook» (2). *Daisy Miller* had come into his possession in Rome; a friend mentioned the bare facts, and James who knew a whole generation of Daisies had no difficulty in bringing her forth from his international bag. And there were all the short pieces, *Lady Barbarina*, *The Siege of London*, *The Madonna of the Future*, *The Passionate Pilgrim*... the stories of pensions, and points of view, the balancing of national traits: James had soon enough — he had in fact always possessed the germs — acquired an international mind which made him see without bias, enabled him to look at Americans, for instance, with the eyes of a Frenchman, even as he could look at

1. *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

2. Vol. XIV, *Lady Barbarina*, etc., p. v.

the French with the eyes of an Englishman, and at the English with the eyes of an Italian.

VI

To the very end James chose his subjects freely and liberally from life. The origin of the last three great novels, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Golden Bowl*, reflect on the one side the sowing of the small seed, and on the other its rapid blossoming under the pressure of his imagination, which had its stimulus in the depths of his experience. He was unable to remember the time when the situation of Milly Theale, in *The Wings of the Dove* was not in his mind. He had never forgotten Minny Temple, her desire to live, her premature death, and reading the pages he consecrated to her in *Notes of a Son and Brother* we realize the extent to which her « case » had affected him. If she had been his model for Isabel Archer, she was more certainly his Milly Theale, for he says of her « death, at the last, was dreadful to her ; she would have given anything to live — and the image of this, which was long to remain with me, appeared so of the essence of tragedy, that I was in the far-off aftertime to seek to lay the ghost by wrapping it, a particular occasion aiding, in the beauty and dignity of art » (1).

1. *Notes of a Son and Brother*, p. 479.

The Ambassadors grew from a casual remark W. D. Howells made to Jonathan Sturges in Paris when the two met one day at Whistler's. This remark, to the effect that one should live all one can, Sturges reported to James, who noted it and thereafter forgot it, until three or four years later the subject sprang at him from his note-book (1). It lies deeply imbedded in the book, this germ; around it James built up, called upon the whole of his Parisian experience, called upon the Parisian sensations of the first sojourn in France. He, too, like Lambert Strether, may have had the feeling that he came away from America too late, that he had wasted his earlier years, and hadn't « lived » intensely enough. Certainly he « felt » his subject profoundly... « I am able to estimate this, as, frankly, quite the best « all round » of all my productions (2). »

In the last of the three novels, *The Golden Bowl*, while we can understand how its world, its people, came from James's world, we are without clue as to its origin. James was so interested, in the preface, in discussing the point of view as exemplified in the case of the Prince and the Princess, that he neglected to speak of the « idea » which first came before he buried himself in the intricacies of « process ». One is tempted to think of the symbolism of this book and the symbolism of *The*

1. *Letters*, vol. I, p. 375.

2. Vol. XXI, *The Ambassadors*, p. VII.

Scarlet Letter and the fact that both books, in a widely different spirit, treat of the same subject. We are in the realm of pure conjecture. Is it possible that the vague suggestion of Hawthorne's book, lingering thirty years after he had disengaged himself from his influence, and after he had written the « English Man of Letters » *Hawthorne*, may have been a dim starting point which soon took on a bright glow, once the novelist had felt that he had been « inoculated » with the idea ?

V

The Telling of the Story

1. THE POINT OF VIEW

I

Once his subject had been determined, James explains in the prefaces, once the imagination had begun to play around it, there arose the question of the process... Art dealt with what one saw ; it plucked its material in the garden of life, but it had no sooner done this than it had to take account of a *process*, that of expression, the literal squeezing out of value, the securing of a superior roundness of form and tightness of texture (1). The first stage in the construction of a novel, for James, was always the determination of the *point of view*. Who is to tell the story, or see it ? From what angle is the subject to be approached ? How are its « values » to be realized ? In whose consciousness are we to follow the incidents ? Who is to be the « centre » ?

His earliest tales are related by a narrator. James soon abandoned this method which seemed to him the easier solution of the story-teller's problem. With his craftsman's enjoyment of multiplied dif-

1. Vol. XXI, *The Ambassadors*, p. 1x.

ficulties he preferred having the story tell itself, as Mr Lubbock observes in *The Craft of Fiction*, so that the intervening hand of the narrator is not seen (1).

He explained this, in part, in the preface to *The Golden Bowl* as « my preference for dealing with my subject-matter, for « seeing my story », through the opportunity and the sensibility of some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested and intelligent witness or reporter, some person who contributes to the case mainly a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it » (2). We have, thus, not James's personal account of the affair, but his account of somebody's impression of it (3). He insisted that this method was a contribution to the intensification of interest. The choice presupposed always an intelligence acute enough to perceive profoundly, possessing a wideness of range which was capable of thorough psychological analysis : an intelligence often closely akin to Henry James's.

He had tried to produce intensity in *Roderick Hudson*, and had succeeded only by finding a centre, a point of view, to command the situation. From this centre the subject had been treated,

1. London, Jonathan Cape : The Travellers' Library, 1928, p. 185.

2. Vol. XXIII, p. v.

3. « Reading [*In the Cage*] was like watching Henry James watching through a knot-hole somebody who was watching somebody else through a knot-hole. » P. L. in *The New Republic*, Dec. 29, 1917.

from it the interest had spread. It lay in Rowland Mallet's consciousness, a consciousness which lighted up the whole book. Reading it we look with Mallet on Roderick, and through his eyes recognize all the finer points of the narrative. His was not necessarily an acute consciousness. James had to keep it on a human footing, make it, simply, intelligent enough to carry the story. He had to relate him to everything involved : what happened to him was to *feel* what was happening to others — and James had to preserve in everything its value for *him*. Similarly in *The American* we are held down to Newman's point of view, *his* vision, *his* conception, *his* interpretation, « at the window of his wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness we are seated, from that admirable position we « assist » (1) ». Here again was the effort to preserve a unity, to secure a dominating centre; and it was essential, if James was to obtain his fullest effect, to multiply the fine touches by which Newman should live and communicate life. James admitted the blood-and-thunder character of the book, its high romanticism — but allowed it to stand or fall by the « more or less convincing image » of his hero.

We have already seen that the great value of *The Portrait of a Lady* resides in Isabel Archer's personality. She is the centre, and the world she moves in plays about her, and is seen only through

1. Vol. II, *The American* preface.

her. « To depend upon her and her little concerns wholly to see you through will necessitate, remember, your really « doing » her » (1). James told himself. After *The Ambassadors* he judged this novel his greatest success ; it was « a structure reared with an « architectural » competence, as Turgenev would have said, that makes it, to the author's own sense, the most proportioned of his productions after *The Ambassadors* — which was to follow it so many years later and which has, no doubt, a superior roundness » (2).

An equally consistent point of view is maintained, of course, in *The Princess Casamassima*, in which Hyacinth Robinson's consciousness mirrors London life. Hyacinth was interesting to James only in proportion as he felt his situation ; and he faced the danger of filling too full so obviously limited a vessel of consciousness. James knew that he ran the risk of showing him as knowing too much and feeling too much, making him « too divinely, too priggishly clever » (3). He avoided the danger, he felt, by rendering poor Hyacinth's bewildered state, in face of the intense London world which surrounds him and presses down upon him. « I confess », James tells us,

I never see the *leading* interest of any human hazard but in a consciousness (on the part of the moved and

1. Vol. III, *The Portrait of a Lady*, preface.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Vol. V, *The Princess Casamassima*, p. VIII.

moving creature) subject to fine intensification and wide enlargement. It is as mirrored in that consciousness that the gross fools, the headlong fools, the fatal fools play their part for us — they have much less to show us in themselves... This means, exactly, that the person capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what is to be felt for it, and so serving in the highest degree to *record* it dramatically and objectively, is the only sort of person on whom we can count not to betray, to cheapen or, as we say, give away, the value and beauty of the thing. By so much as the affair matters *for* some such individual, by so much do we get the best there is of it, and by so much as it falls within the scope of a denser and duller, a more vulgar and more shallow capacity, do we get a picture dim and meagre (1).

What a man thought, and what he felt, observed James, were the history and character of what he did « on all of which things the logic of intensity rests. Without intensity where is vividness, and without vividness where is presentability ? » (2).

II

The preface to *The Princess Casamassima* is very important, for here James discusses at great length the value, the absolute necessity (as far as he was concerned) for a point of view, realizing, possibly, that he was the first to use it consciously and elaborately in English fiction, and that it forced him into detailed analysis such as had never

1. *Ibid.*, p. xii.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

before been attempted in the novel. We may concede that Clarissa Harlowe, pouring out her thoughts and emotions in her letters is doing the same thing ; but her psychology is simpler, her emotions are on a plane of Richardsonian sentimentality. James's analysis was much more reasoned and therefore much more penetrating ; had he written *Clarissa Harlowe*, we should probably be watching not only her mind at work, but the mind of someone else who was watching her. On the score of his point of view James found some affinity with George Eliot's effort to show the history and adventures of her characters by their feelings and the nature of their mind. And in truth, in some ways James is closer to George Eliot than any of the other nineteenth century English novelists. James went, however, the whole length. His provision for interest consisted in « placing advantageously, placing right in the middle of the light, the most polished of possible mirrors on the subject » (1). There they were, these mirrors, Rowland Mallet, the « all-objective Newman », « the thick-peopled imagination of Isabel Archer » ... « such unmistakeable examples as that of Merton Densher [*The Wings of the Dove*] ... that of Lambert Strether [*The Ambassadors*] ... (he a mirror verily of miraculous silver and quite pre-eminent... for the connexion) and that of the Prince in the first half

1. *Ibid.*, p. xv.

and that of the Princess in the second half of *The Golden Bowl* » (1). All of them are intense perceivers : the divided Vanderbank of *The Awkward Age*, and Fleda Vetch, of *The Spoils of Poynton* « through whose own delicate vision of everything so little of the human value of her situation is wasted for us » (2), and the small recording governess of *The Turn of the Screw*, and the innocent child in *What Maisie Knew* patching together her little world, « all ineffectually »... James might pass from one novel to another : the consistent all-important point of view had been rigidly followed, and, as his work advanced, took on ramifications which added to the complex character of his fiction.

There was Fleda Vetch in *The Spoils of Poynton*... who both saw and felt, while the others felt without seeing. By making her his centre he allowed her intelligence to play with sufficient freedom and ease to guarantee us « that quantum of the impression of beauty which is the most fixed of the possible advantages of our producible effect » (3). Her fine interpretations and criticisms were applied without waste to the surrounding tangle : they shed a powerful clarifying light. She enhanced the stupidity of the others and they in turn enhanced her intelligence. Mrs Gereth, for all her cleverness, would not have been as good a centre : she was not

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

3. Vol. X, *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. xiv.

intelligent, only clever, compared with Fleda who was only intelligent. In a similar way poor little Maisie becomes an «ironic centre» shedding a light beyond the reach even of her own comprehension.

III

In the last three novels the question of centre becomes more difficult — more difficult even than in the *Tragic Muse*, where he had been divided between three minds, Miriam's, Peter's, and Nick Dormer's. There, James admitted, he had not entirely succeeded in balancing his scene; the emphasis invariably fell on Miriam. But in *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors* and in *The Golden Bowl* the point of view is worked out in extremely complicated terms. Where formerly he allowed his readers to follow the analysis of the situation through the observing mind and consciousness of a central figure, he reverses the situation in *The Wings of the Dove* and allows his centre to be seen only as reflected in the minds of the other characters. He established here, in fact, a series of centres, and they, in turn, acted as mirrors for the all-central Milly Theale. He begins with the presentation of Kate Croy and slowly builds up her consciousness; she is a «reflector» even as Merton Densher will be — and through her we will watch the reflection of the «dove» Milly. James was

excessively proud of this method. He had never, he assures us in the preface, « embraced the logic of any superior process » (1). The centres had, each, to be selected and fixed, after which they became the ruling factors. « There is no economy of treatment without an adopted, a related point of view... » (2). We shall see later how James arranged these « reflectors », so that they shone in « arranged alternation », each adding its contribution to the building up of Milly. At one stage the drama is brought to a head in Kate's consciousness ; Milly's situation ceases at a given moment to be « renderable » in terms closer than those supplied by Kate's intelligence, or in a richer degree, by Densher's, or « for one fond hour by poor Mrs Stringham's... » (3).

James did not feel that he had achieved the full symmetry he desired in the book ; but in the long earlier part of it he recognized « a positively close and felicitous application of method » (4). It had been entirely a question of learning « the secret of the discriminated occasion » (5), of finding the right moment when each mind, each « reflector » should come into play.

In *The Ambassadors* James returned to the single, the direct point of view. Here the scene is co-

1. Vol. XIX, *The Wings of the Dove*, p. xiv.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

3. *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

4. *Ibid.*, p. xix.

5. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

loured by the all-absorbing, all-embracing mind of Lambert Strether. The book hinges as we have seen on Strether's outburst to little Bilham in the second chapter of the fifth book: « Live all you can; it's a mistake not to... If you haven't had that what *have* you had ». It devolved upon James to analyze the process of Strether's vision which led him to this outburst. He does this by throwing him on « his lifelong trick of intense reflexion » (1). Knowing the type, knowing the New England out of which he comes, James is able to give us the picture of a mind which is literally undergoing « as a result of new and unexpected assaults and infusions » (2), a change almost from hour to hour; it is to be the projection of Strether's consciousness upon the Parisian, the European scene, from beginning to end, without intermission or deviation, his very gropings constituting part of the interest.

One might accuse James of a lack of variety in adhering to the one centre; but he avoids this by a scenic treatment which we will presently examine. In this way he eschews looseness. Had he chosen, as so many authors do, to tell the story in the first person, he would have been, he felt, smuggling the story in by the back door. « The first person in the long piece is a form foredoomed to looseness », he observes, « and looseness was never much my affair » (3).

1. Vol. XXI, *The Ambassadors*, p. xiii.

2. Vol. XXI, *The Ambassadors*, p. x.

3. *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

And finally, as an example of James's point of view method, we have the story of the Prince and the Princess, in *The Golden Bowl*; through the whole of the first volume we are in the mind of the Prince examining his world; and through the second in the mind of the Princess — the two fitting together like the two sides of a coin. Their chronicle struck James « as quite of the stuff to keep us from forgetting that absolutely *no* refinement of ingenuity or of precaution need be dreamed of as wasted in that most exquisite of all good causes, the appeal to variety, the appeal to incalculability, the appeal to a high refinement and a handsome wholeness of effect » (1).

IV

He had arrived, in his search for variety, a high refinement, a handsome wholeness of effect, at a very important discovery in the art of fiction. In elaborating the point of view he sought to approach his subject in the best possible manner, in the only manner consistent with his own fastidious artistic taste. He found himself obliged, thus, to give a picture of the mind at work, of the whole play of consciousness. We stand, here, at the beginning of subjective fiction, of analysis, minute and detailed, which in the work of James Joyce and

1. Vol. XXIII, *The Golden Bowl*, p. vii.

Virginia Woolf, has become our contemporary « stream of consciousness » method. They have only gone one step further than James. He selected carefully, and arranged the thoughts of his characters, giving only such thoughts as bear on his narrative and are capable of advancing it. Joyce and Mrs Woolf, while also selecting (to a lesser degree) are anxious to give an impression of the actual *flow* of thought, and in this are coming nearer the old *tranche de vie* ideal, as Mrs Wharton observes in *The Writing of Fiction*.

Their works, also, are governed by the point of view. In Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* we see only with Stephen Dedalus, and the world of Clongowes and Dublin is presented to us entirely in his terms, even as little Maisie's world was given to us in terms of her childish mind. Of the two books James's must have been the most difficult to *do* — for Joyce gave us the expanding consciousness of a young poet, and drew from his own experience, while James, taking a small child, gave us the play of her little mind over a definitely marked, difficult situation ; he is held down throughout by the limitations of the childish mind ; Joyce is free to use Dedalus as he sees fit.

James realized all the dangers of the method, and in most cases avoided them. If one was to look into an individual consciousness it would have to be a consciousness capable of wide perception, of « registering » in a satisfactory manner all that the

author requires of him. Joyce, too, in choosing Dedalus, and Leopold Bloom, Mrs Woolf in choosing Mrs Dalloway or Mrs Ramsay, have exercised similar discrimination. The danger of choosing commonplace minds is to be seen in the work of Dorothy Richardson, one of the earliest writers after James to attempt this type of fiction. It is bound to result in tedious observation, and a limited range : one's story becomes as limited as the mind it depicts. And while it is possible and even desirable to have pictures of limited minds, the author's «treatment» of them is the only assurance that the reader may not be as bored as the characters are boring (1).

1. I do not include Proust in this discussion principally because his use of the first person places him in an entirely different category among the recent writers of psychological fiction. It gave him a looseness and freedom which James refused to take, and which Joyce and Mrs Woolf have eschewed, preferring the more difficult approach.

2. PICTURE AND DRAMA

I

James interchanges the terms picture and drama freely in his prefaces. The « picture » was the extended area in which he planned to develop his subject : the « drama » was more generally thought of as related to the action of the story. He used them rather indiscriminately, and did not always distinguish clearly between them. He translated his aesthetic of the novel frequently into terms of painting and theatre, his earlier works principally in terms of painting, his later almost entirely in terms of drama.

He understood the art of painting as well as the art the of theatre ; but the latter eventually dominated, for he tried to express himself within the confines of its form. He had, it is true, first studied painting. In the days of their Newport residence he had frequented, it will be remembered, the studio of William Morris Hunt, where he soon discovered that he did not possess his brother's talent for rendering subjects in oils ; but he had occasion here to acquire the fundamentals of art criticism and an appreciation of technique which

was later to serve him. His early knowledge was allowed to mature in the important galleries of Europe. James visited them religiously... And when he came to London he met the pre-Raphaelites, and here there was more talk of art. Presently he counted among his friends Whistler and Sargent, and their circles, and began to write art criticism in the same scholarly fashion in which he wrote of the English and French theatre of his time.

Painting and painters formed the themes of some of his best early stories — notably *The Madonna of the Future*. Roderick Hudson is a sculptor in the Rome of William Wetmore Story (1). And painters and sculptors move freely through the pages of the later stories : Noémie Nioche, the little copyist in *The American*, Nick Dormer and his problem in *The Tragic Muse*, Gloriani, who hovers in the background of more than one novel... the talk of art, of galleries, of museums on every side... and was it not in Whistler's garden that Howells uttered the few words around which *The Ambassadors* was built ? And wasn't it George du Maurier who gave James the idea for *The Real Thing* ? It is not surprising that in James's loose aesthetic of the novel, the « picture » — it became later the « dramatic picture » — was an important part of his code.

But if painting occupied such an important place

1. See *William Wetmore Story and his Friends* the only biography which James wrote.

how much more important was the drama — for James, in his old age, looking back, felt that he had always thought, had in childhood even lisped, in « scenes » (1). No finer testimony can be found than in that great moment in his life, a moment happily preserved for us in the pencil-scrawled sheets found by Mr Lubbock among his posthumous papers (representing James's own emotions as he is feeling his way towards a new novel), when he wrote, in an outburst of ecstacy, « I come back, I come back yet again and again, to my only seeing it in the dramatic way — as I can only see everything and anything now... » (2). A lifetime of interest in the theatre, as I have shown elsewhere (3) led him to this statement. He had examined closely the theatres of Paris and London ; for five years he had abandoned fiction and written only for the stage... and where he had been a novelist turned dramatist, he was, once he resumed the writing of novels, a dramatist turned novelist. And the prefaces of the last « dramatic » novels explain completely this devotion to the « scenic » method in the writing of fiction.

II

In his prefaces, particularly to the earlier novels and stories, James designates himself as a « pain-

1. *A Small Boy and Others*, pp. 272-274.

2. *Letters*, vol. I, p. xx.

3. *Henry James : Les Années dramatiques*, Paris, 1931.

ter of life »... He tells us, for instance, that his problem in *Roderick Hudson* was to give the image and the sense of certain things, while still keeping them subordinate to his plan « to give all the sense, in a word, without all the substance or all the surface, and so to summarize and fore-shorten, so to make values both rich and sharp, that the mere procession of items and profiles is not only, for the occasion, superseded, but is, for essential quality, almost « compromised » — such a case of delicacy proposes itself at every turn to the painter of life who wishes both to treat his chosen subject and to confine his necessary picture. It is only by doing such things that art becomes exquisite, and it is only by positively becoming exquisite that it keeps clear of becoming vulgar, repudiates the coarse industries that masquerade in its name... » (1).

The picture was larger than the scene : he was to compose it as the painter « composes » — with due care to « values » and « lights », balance and the elimination of unnecessary details. He considered each novel or story as a huge picture, containing many scenes and grouped around a definite centre, or centres. Working in this fashion made for economy, and working hand in hand with the dramatist made for intensity, and economy and intensity were to James practically the beginning and the end of the art of fiction.

1. Vol. I, *Roderick Hudson*, p. VIII.

In *The American* James is concerned with the picture of Christopher Newman's consistency, and this is done by the multiplication of « fine touches ». James's important novel of the middle years is, as the title informs us, a « portrait » of a lady. Here he felt himself, as he was working in rooms on the Riva Schiavoni, in Venice, while the waterside life, the lagoon, and the ceaseless human chatter of the city entered his window, coming to grips with his subject; and the whole played into his consciousness as he sought « the next true touch » for his « canvas » (1). He tells us in his preface to *The Princess Casamassima* that the « affair of the painter is not the immediate, it is the reflected field of life, the realm not of all application, but of *appreciation* — a truth that makes our measure of effect altogether different... » (2). He is trying to secure a pictorial ensemble, even as he tried in *The Tragic Muse*.

« A short story », he observed elsewhere (3) « has to choose between being either an anecdote or a picture... I rejoice in the anecdote but I revel in the picture. »

III

He revelled in the picture, but he consecrated to the drama : *that* was his real passion. He flat-

1. Vol. III, *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. v.
2. Vol. V, *The Princess Casamassima*, p. VIII.
3. Vol. X, *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. xxiv,

tered himself that he had never been false to it — the desire to lay a scene and launch a drama. He had delighted in creating alarm and suspense and surprise and relief (1). Once the idea had come, the subject suggested itself, the picture taken its frame, — at first more or less elastic — James would hear the voice whispering «Dramatize it, dramatize it!» and he would invariably yield to its solicitations.

He had yielded in the earlier works less consistently than in the later : but he had yielded... in *Roderick Hudson* he was dealing with an action, one borrowed «a scrap of the dramatist's all-in-all, his intensity — which the novelist so often ruefully envies him as a fortune in itself» (2). The drama of *Roderick Hudson* resided in Rowland Mallet's consciousness, even as the drama of Christopher Newman was the drama of his consciousness. In *The American*, once he had started, James «felt the thing go — which is the most a dramatist can ever ask of his drama».

In the preface to *The Tragic Muse*, the novel which divides James's earlier period from his later, and which synthesizes the whole of James's art since it combines his twofold interest in painting and the drama, we find a fuller discussion of novel and drama. Here he tells us that the first half of a fiction figures to him insistently as the stage or

1. Vol. XVII, *The Altar of the Dead*, etc., p. xvi.

2. Vol. I, *Roderick Hudson*.

theatre for the second half « ... and I have in general given so much space to making the theatre propitious that my halves have too often proved strangely unequal. Thereby has arisen with grim regularity the question of artfully, of consummately masking the fault and conferring on the false quantity the brave appearance of the true » (1). *The Tragic Muse* was concerned with two principal characters and with several points of view : James's problem was to fit them together, and this he did, he observes, by working out dramatic, or at least, scenic conditions — scenic conditions which are as near an approach, he says, to the dramatic, as the novel may permit itself, and which have this in common with it, that they move in the light of *alternation* (2).

Henry James emphasized the method of *alternation* : by projecting various scenes which in turn threw light on his subject and characters he was able to secure the essential variety to ward off all danger of monotony incurred in adhering to definite points of view. The scenic method imposed on James a consistency « other than that of the novel at its loosest, and for one's subject, a different view and a different placing of centre. The charm of the scenic consistency, the consistency of the multiplication of *aspects*, that of making them amusingly various, had haunted the author

1. Vol. VII, *The Tragic Muse*, p. XII.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xv.

of *The Tragic Muse* from far back, and he was in due course to yield to it all luxuriously, too luxuriously, perhaps in *The Awkward Age* (1).

We shall presently examine how the scenic method, with *alternation*, became for Henry James, all-important. But we find it already at work in the last novel of the middle years, when he is preparing for intensive dramatic writing. He wrote the whole of *The Tragic Muse* with his eye on the theatre. Miriam is a character he had long desired to render vividly. He tells us he had always wanted to «do «the actress », to touch the theatre, to meet the connexion somehow or other, in any free plunge of the speculative fork into the contemporary social salad ». (2).

IV

The Awkward Age best exemplifies James's dramatic method applied to fiction. It was the first long novel which he wrote after the dramatic years, and reveals a direct influence of the theatre. He admits as much in the preface «... I remember rejoicing... after getting launched in *The Awkward Age*, as if I were in fact constructing a play... » (3).

Here was an entirely dramatic subject, the study of the crisis in a home attendant on the daughter's

1. *Ibid.*, pp. xiv, xv.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

3. Vol. IX, *The Awkward Age*, p. xx.

coming of age, that interval, as Mr Percy Lubbock observes, in which « she is still too young for the freedom of her elder's style, and it looks as though she might disconcert them not a little, sitting there with wide eyes » (1). James invoked « the spirit of the lightest comedy » in treating this subject. The questions which posed themselves at once were the essence of drama : what will happen, who suffer, who not suffer, what turn be determined, what crisis created, what issue found ? These centred about his starting point which had been « the liberal firesides beyond the wide glow of which, in a comparative dimness, female adolescence hovered and waited » (2).

He was determined — the subject seemed to demand it — to allow the story to tell itself dramatically. That meant, of course, dialogue, constructive dialogue, organic and dramatic, representing and embodying substance and form. The dramatist had to build, was committed to architecture, to construction at any cost... James remembered that in sketching out the project of the story for the editors of *Harper's Weekly*, where it was first published, he drew on a sheet of paper a circle consisting « of a number of small rounds disposed at equal distance about a central object. The central object was my situation, my subject in itself, to which the thing would owe its title, and the small

1. *The Craft of Fiction*, p. 191.

2. Vol. IX, *The Awkward Age*, p. ix.

rounds represented so many distinct lamps, as I liked to call them, the function of each of which would be to light with all due intensity one of its aspects » (1). And he adds : « The beauty of the conception was in this approximation of the respective divisions of my form to the successive Acts of a Play... The divine distinction of the act of a play... was... in its special, its guarded objectivity ». He had sought in his other novels to go behind and explain motives and conduct, but he wanted here to do just the contrary, to « make the presented occasion tell all its story itself, remain shut up in its own presence » (2).

There follows in the preface a long discussion of the difficulties of the dramatist, in which James continually refers to *The Awkward Age* as a drama — difficulties, which, if we read between the lines, explain his own failure as a dramatist. It is the dramatist's duty, he observes, to be true to form, interesting, clear... the moment he makes his picture complex he ceases to be clear : the moment he remains clear, « with the clearness required by the infantine intelligence of any public consenting to see a play » what becomes of the « importance » of the subject. « If it's important by any other critical measure than the little foot-rule the produced piece has to conform to, it is predestined to be a muddle » (3).

1. *Ibid.*, pp. xv, xvi.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. xix, xx.

Fortunately, in writing *The Awkward Age*, he was the playwright freed of the theatre, able to do as he wished without interference from actor or manager, and not subject to the whims of the audience. He felt in the book the support the dramatist feels of a strong form; he participated in his technical amusement, he tasted to the full the « bitter-sweetness of his draught — the beauty and the difficulty... of escaping poverty *even though* the references in one's action can only be, with intensity, to each other, to things exactly on the same plane of exhibition with themselves » (1).

He admitted over-treatment; for that is, in a way, one of the great faults of *The Awkward Age*. — *tour de force* that it is, its interest lies above all in its beautiful architecture. It is perhaps one of the most finely constructed novels ever written, and also the most difficult to grasp, for structure has superseded narrative. The picture of Nanda Brook-enham's situation, the novelist tells us, while seeming at first glance to wander and sprawl, presents itself on absolutely scenic lines, and « each of these scenes in itself, and each as related to each, and to all of its companions, abides without a moment's deflexion by the principle of the stage play » (2). James himself held that, even acknowledging the charge of over-treatment, it was impossible to say where the form begins and the

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

substance ends, « the sacrament of execution indissolubly marries them » (1). One has the sense, indeed, in reading *The Awkward Age*, of a thing beautifully, perfectly, done... but James himself wrote the condemnation, — if one might condemn so beautiful a work — when he admitted that his process had been « to pump the case gaspingly dry, dry not only of superfluous moisture, but absolutely... of breathable air » (2).

V

Drama was, from then on, James's obsession in the novels, as it had been in the theatre when he had tried to write plays. In *The Spoils of Poynton* what the different characters would « show » would be the key to his « modest drama and would, indeed, alone make a drama of any sort possible » (3). The moment he had conceived the idea of *What Maisie Knew* he found himself « in the presence of the red dramatic spark that glowed at the core of my vision and that, as I gently blew upon it, burned higher and clearer » (4). *In the Cage* was entirely dramatic : the action of the drama played out in the girl's consciousness... and, if he spoke of *action* embodied in such « quiet » stories as this one, it was under the « renewed recognition of the

1. *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

3. Vol. X, *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. viii.

4. Vol. XI, *What Maisie Knew*, p. vi.

inveterate instinct with which they keep conforming to the « scenic » law » (1). They persisted in becoming little constituted dramas, founded on the « logic of the « scene ». « Going over the pages here placed together has been for me », he tells us, « quite to watch the scenic system at play. The treatment by « scene » regularly, quite rhythmically recurs... the scenic passages are *wholly* and logically scenic, having for their rule of beauty the principle of the « conduct », the organic development of a scene... The great advantage for the total effect is that we feel with the definite alternation, how the theme *is* being treated. That is, we feel it when, in such tangled connexions, we happen to care. I shouldn't really go on as if this were the case with many readers » (2). In *The Aspern Papers* Henry James is trying to record a final scene of the « rich dim Shelley drama » played out « in the very theatre of our « modernity » (3) ». *The Turn of the Screw* is an *action* from beginning to end. *The Reverberator*, too, anecdote though it is, is a « small straight *action* » and therefore treatable in the « blest drama-light which, really, making for intelligibility as nothing else does, orders and regulates » becomes a case of the planned rotation of aspects and their scenic determination (4). And then the little voice whispering : « Dramatize, dra

1. *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

3. Vol. XII, *The Aspern Papers*, etc., p. ix.

4. Vol. XIII, *The Reverberator*, p. vi.

matize ! » as the ideas came for *Daisy Miller*; for *The Author of Beltraffio*, *Broken Wings*, *Europe*, *The Jolly Corner*, *Owen Wingrave*, *Pandora*... and the other tales which reveal James as a master not only of the novel form, but also of the short story.

If he adhered so closely to the scenic method in all these works, and called upon the drama to strengthen his form, we must certainly expect a consistent application of method in the last three novels, which crowned his work as a novelist. And this is, in fact, the case. *The Wings of the Dove*, with its systematic search for « arch-refinements of tact, and taste, of design and instinct » (1) for the « discriminated occasion », is James's last stepping stone to the novel which he regarded as the best « all-round » of his productions, *The Ambassadors*.

This novel, James boasted, was scenically consistent ; followed rigorously its point of view, and in its developemnt and analysis, its use of picture and drama, fulfilled all the rigid requirements he had set himself. He had literally wanted to squeeze out value, which was, after all, the whole process of expression. Strether's drama had become « the drama of discrimination » (2) but there was, in addition, the constant need to keep « interest fresh ». Employing a centre was a dreadful menace to variety, variety which James could only obtain by dramatizing Strether's consciousness. This

1. Vol. XIX, *The Wings of the Dove*, p. XIX.

2. Vol. XXI, *The Ambassadors*, p. XIII.

meant, of necessity, considerable « string-pulling » : but half the dramatist's art « as we all know », James observes « ...is in the use of *ficelles* ; by which I mean in a deep dissimulation of his dependence on them » (1). There was for him no other method of procedure : the material of *The Ambassadors* conforming exactly to that of *The Wings of the Dove* was « absolutely... the stuff of drama » (2). And the same was true in *The Golden Bowl* in which the scenic law was applied with James's habitual care to sustain the two points of view through which the novel has its being.

1. *Ibid.*, p. xix.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xx.

VI

Observations

I

There are artists who practise their craft intuitively, unconscious, often, of their own powers : there are artists who combine aesthetics with creation, and Henry James was one of these. The validity of his aesthetic — the question of theory and practice in his work — should be discussed (and at great length) elsewhere, and it is to be hoped that someone will undertake this task in the very near future. Mr Percy Lubbock has done it to some extent in his excellent study, *The Craft of Fiction*. The one existing book bearing directly on the subject is incredibly poor (1). It consists of a series of ill-digested citations, treated with very little understanding, and contributes nothing to an appreciation of the novelist.

It would be out of place to discuss the theory and practice here — but some observation might justly be made about the theory, *qua* theory. And, strictly speaking, there is little that can be said of James's general attitude towards the novel once we have exposed it : he himself enunciated it very clearly on more than one occasion. The novel, gene-

1. Hughes, Herbert Leland, *Theory and Practice in Henry James*, Ann Arbor, 1926.

rally, was an impression, an interpretation of human life, a picture of it, rendered in narrative, in prose. But with James it was something more important still : interpret life ? — one had another step to take — reveal it ! The novel was a revelation of life. The novelist, far from being a mere story-teller had to possess a seeing eye and a recording hand. The seeing eye had to observe beyond the exterior surface of things : had to study conduct, and people, and, in short, see *into* life. The recording hand had to be conscious of form and structure, process and method.

Henry James knew what he wanted to do : and he did it. But is there not a fundamental danger in his placing of the centre, his focussing of mirrors, his « lights » and « reflectors », a fundamental danger of resorting to subterfuge in the relating of his story, a too-conscious effort to avoid direct narration ? At its best the method of centralization gives the novelist a strong grip of his materials ; he is able to mass and control : but the characters can be turned into over-vigilant detectives, in their anxiety to secure « points » about other people. Some of them reveal an unnatural, almost a morbid curiosity in the doings, the very minds of others ; they are continually discussing and analyzing every move, glance, gesture, almost, one might say, every thought of someone else. What is *The Sacred Fount* but the story of a group of people in a country house, possessed of an uncontrollable

curiosity about the other people present. There lies the shortcoming of an otherwise admirable method : it meant economy and intensity, but James paid a definite price for it. He had to resort, on occasions, to too many *ficelles* to apply his method and make his story « go ». But that necessity arose only in a few instances. The bulk of his work splendidly testifies to creative effort done under severe restrictions, rigidly self-imposed.

II

For James was a severe critic of himself. The conscious artist is that of necessity. He knew his limitations, his every shortcoming, and his efforts, for instance, to arrive at variety (the placing of a consistent centre leaving his work exposed to monotony of effect) reveals that he was constantly devising ways to cover up any loop-holes that might occur. His judgments of his own writings were, in most cases, extremely good, and when we think of the number of men of genius who misjudge their work, this fact is very gratifying, especially since James was misjudged by his general public. It is true that he disparaged his fine early novels, but then the later novels did seem to him (and are) superlatively better. His prefaces to *The American*, to *The Tragic Muse*, to *The Wings of the Dove* reveal that he was thoroughly conscious

of his faults, and he was the first to admit them. His greatest error, it seems to the present writer was his condemnation of that beautiful novel of the earlier years, *Washington Square*. Shortly after its publication he wrote to Mrs Linton (1) : « I greatly value your judgment of my books, for you judge as one who knows and understands. So much the better for me if you are so pleased. You won't be particularly, by the way, with *Washington Square* : it is the poorest thing I have done, being monotonous and meagre ». This rather cruel judgment appears all the more inexplicable when James adds : « But I recommend you with more confidence the two shorter tales that are bound with it. » The two tales were the amusing, but not very important, trifles thrown off by James in a moment of leisure, *The Pension Beaurepas* and *A Bundle of Letters*. One cannot, however, accept the remark as final, for James's letters must be read in the light of the people to whom they were written. It is possible that he was « falling in » here with Mrs Linton's literary tastes, even as he later « fell in » with Stevenson's ideas about the stage.

But, returning to James's theory, his method, for any shortcomings it may possess — (and what ever reproach we may have we cannot accuse him of straining for his effects) — makes his work none

1. From an unpublished letter in the possession of Mr Paul Lemperly. See appendix.

the less important. The core of it is solid, and solid in the closeness of its weave and consistency of its development. The story in his novels, the actual plotting, is of secondary importance : it is the situation which counts, and a fine psychological situation was, for James, more important, because of the possibilities of analysis, than a tale filled with action, adventure, « character ». Mr T. S. Eliot, justly remarks : « James ne nous a pas apporté des « idées », mais bien un univers nouveau de pensée et de sentiment. Cet univers certains l'ont demandé à Dostoïevsky, d'autres à James ; et je m'incline à penser que l'esprit de James, à tel point moins violent, à tel point plus raisonnable et plus résigné que celui du Russe, ne lui cède point en profondeur, et qu'il est plus utile, plus applicable à notre avenir (1). »

It is certainly true that the world of Henry James will, more and more, hold out something definite to his readers, for, as we continue to turn towards the psychological, and as we ourselves become more analytic and complex, we will find that he responds to a greater degree to our present needs. For, if Marcel Proust has found so large a public it is inevitable that Henry James will also. In truth, James the psychological novelist is all-important (2).

1. « Lettre d'Angleterre », *La Nouvelle Revue française*, November 1923.

2. See L. Cazamian, *L'Évolution psychologique et la littérature en Angleterre*, Paris, 1920 and E. Legouis and L. Cazamian, *Histoire de la Littérature anglaise*, p. 1265. Paris, 1925.

And if we are to look about for some concrete statement of James's love of form we will find it above all in a letter he wrote a few years before his death to Hugh Walpole, where he, too, spoke of Dostoievsky.

«Don't let anyone persuade you — there are plenty of ignorant and fatuous duffers to try to do it », he said, « — that strenuous selection and comparison are not the very essence of art, and that Form is [not] substance to that degree that there is absolutely no substance without it. Form alone *takes*, and holds and preserves, substance — saves it from the welter of helpless verbiage that we swim in as in a sea of tasteless tepid pudding, and that makes one ashamed of an art capable of such degradations. Tolstoi and D. [Dostoievsky] are fluid puddings, though not tasteless because the amount of their own minds and souls in solution in the broth gives it savour and flavour, thanks to the strong, rank quality of their genius and their experience. But there are all sorts of things to be said of them, and in particular, that we see how great a vice is their lack of composition, their defiance of economy and architecture, directly they are emulated and imitated; then, as subjects of emulation, models, they quite give themselves away. There is nothing so deplorable as a work of art with a *leak* in its interest... » (1).

1. *Letters*, vol. II, p. 237.

VII

The Figure in the Carpet

I

One invariably comes to *The Figure in the Carpet*, one, invariably, is forced to base one's conclusions about James and the art of fiction on this enigmatical little tale, written during James's dramatic years. Even here, where we have been considering James's art in a more limited sense, as he himself viewed it in his prefaces, the case of Hugh Vereker « looms large ». Vereker, it will be remembered, is one of the several misunderstood authors who figured in the stories James contributed to the *Yellow Book* in the eighteen-nineties. All his life he has tried to write his books in a certain way, has aimed at a definite technique, has evolved a pattern which stretches from volume to volume. And yet no one understands it, no one perceives it, no one seems to be interested in tracing « the figure in the carpet ». The current criticism, as usual, remains aloof, and ignores what are, to Vereker's mind, the essential elements of his art.

All the critics who have written about Henry James have quite rightly attempted to apply this story to James himself and to his work, generally with a good deal of conjecture and elaborate thesis. Each one has felt that *he* has discovered the « fi-

figure » in James's carpet. But conjecture is quite unnecessary, for we can draw from several fairly direct remarks in the prefaces the suggestion that James intends them to explain his « figure in the carpet »... isn't he doing for himself what Vereker wanted criticism to do for *his* work : explain « the order, the form, the texture » of his books, which should constitute for the initiated a complete representation of his little « tricks »... ? Is there not a depth of implication in James's remark in the preface in which he discusses *In the Cage* to the effect that the finer idiosyncrasies of a literary form (he is referring particularly here to his scenic method) « seem to be regarded as outside the scope of criticism — small reference to them do I remember ever to have met ? » (1). And what of the reference to the fact that James's public was not aware, never seemed to be conscious, of his methods ? « The great advantage for the total effect is that we feel with the definite alternation, how the theme *is* being treated. That is we feel it when, in such tangled connexions, we happen to care. I shouldn't really go on as if this were the case with many readers. (2) »

One does not question the fact that James considered himself as the misunderstood author ; he admits it in the preface to the volume containing *The Lesson of the Master*, *The Death of the Lion*,

1. Vol. XI, *What Maisie Knew*, etc., p. XXI.

2. *Ibid.*

The Next Time, The Figure in the Carpet... « These pieces have this in common that they deal all with the literary life, gathering their motive in each case from some noted adventure, some felt embarrassment, some extreme predicament of the artist enamoured of perfection, ridden by his idea or paying for his sincerity... the material for any picture of personal states so specifically complicated as those of my hapless friends in the present volume will have been drawn preponderantly from the depths of the designer's own mind... the states represented, the embarrassments and predicaments studied, the tragedies and comedies recorded, can be intelligibly fathered but on his own intimate experience (1). » As for the « all-ingenious » *Figure in the Carpet*, what could be more significant than his statement : « nothing would induce me to come into closer quarters with you on the correspondence of this anecdote. Here exactly is a good example for you of the virtue of your taking on trust — when I have artfully begotten in you a disposition. All I can at this point say is that if ever I was aware of ground and matter for a significant fable, I was certainly aware of them in that connexion » (2). But he does tell us that he came upon Hugh Vereker by the generalization, the habit of having noted for many years : « how strangely and helplessly, among us all, what we

1. Vol. XV, *The Lesson of the Master*, p. 1x.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xii.

call criticism... is apt to stand off from the intended sense of things, from such finely-attested matters, on the artist's part, as a spirit and a form, a bias and a logic, of his own » (1).

II

We accept the prefaces, then, with their discussion of the order, the form, the texture of James's books, as constituting the figure, the pattern in Henry James's carpet. And the conclusions we draw are simple: his belief in the novel as an organic whole, a growth which, in a sensibility conscious of form and manner, makes of fiction a work of art, brings it to the plane of poetry and drama. The prefaces are full of general references to the novel as a form, full of estimates of the difficulties which James imposed upon himself and overcame. He eschewed the easier solution to any problem, not because he wished to multiply difficulty, or because he revelled in subtlety, but because the easy way out for James, the « back-door exit », the obvious way out, was most often the vulgar, dodged, often, the real problems of art, which for him were the securing of a unity of form and substance. He sought for greater depths, for refinements which his own artistic judgment deman-

1. *Ibid.*

ded. In this he stands apart from all the English novelists who preceded him.

The art of « representation », James tells us in the preface to *Roderick Hudson* (1) bristles with questions : but whatever makes it arduous makes it infinite, causes the practice of it, with experience to spread in a widening rather than narrowing circle. That he enjoyed these difficulties, or rather, enjoyed overcoming them, we can observe from preface to preface : he looks back at old problems solved with a sense of the thing well done, with a genuine feeling of satisfaction and achievement. They might leave him, these struggles with form, « weary and worn ; but how, after his fashion, he will have lived ! » (2) And he adds : « Who can imagine free selection — which is the beautiful, terrible *whole* of art — without free difficulty. »

He believed in difficulties of form, but he believed also that the tools had to be buried, the shavings swept away — in short that the method and manner had to be hidden behind the matter. Experience (so he said) was a balloon, tied to the earth : it was the romancer's duty to cut the cable without our detecting him. In approaching the drama James's attitude had been similar. « If it were easy to write a good play », he had written William James on February 6, 1891 (3). « I couldn't and

1. Vol. I, *Roderick Hudson*, p. v.

2. Vol. II, *The American*.

3. *Letters*, vol. I, pp. 179-181.

wouldn't think of it ; but it is, in fact, damnably hard... and that constitutes a solid respectability — guarantees one's intellectual self-respect. » In the drama, too, he insisted, one had to cut the cable without being detected — that was the difficulty, and James failed to overcome it. In the novel, where he was freer, he succeeded. For here there was the elasticity of the form itself, which gave the novelist a lease on life denied the dramatist.

III

There was the form itself — the novel, large, loose, capacious. It had a power, while preserving its form, to range through all the differences of the individual relation to its general subject-matter, all the varieties of outlook on life, of disposition to reflect and project, created by conditions that are never the same from man to man... » (1). In short the house of fiction had not one window but a million — windows which could be pierced in its vast front by individual vision and individual will. Far from being hinged doors opening straight on life, these windows provided apertures for the various observers, and each one was bound to see things differently : one saw more where the other saw less, one saw black, the other white, one coarse, the other fine... « The spreading field, the human

1. Vol. III, *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. x.

scene, is the « choice of subject »; the pierced aperture, either broad or balconied or slit-like and low browed, is the « literary form »; but they are singly or together as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher — without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. Tell me what the artist is, and I will tell you of what he has been conscious. Thereby I shall express to you at once his boundless freedom and his « moral » reference (1). » For fiction one had to have the root of one's subject within one, the sense of life and the penetrating imagination — without that one was a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured. But if one *did* have it one couldn't be helpless, one was not without resource, even before the most abysmal difficulties (2).

Yes, the novel was « under the right persuasion », under Henry James's persuasion, « the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms » (3). All it required was a subject and a painter (large requirements these) ... but for its subject it had, magnificently, the whole human consciousness.

IV

The prefaces have been little read because of their loose rambling structure, because of the over-

1. *Ibid.*

2. Vol. V, *The Princess Casamassima*, p. xxiii.

3. Vol. XXI, *The Ambassadors*, p. xxi.

flowing later style of Henry James, which, to the uninitiated, presents pitfalls at every turn. But once one has grasped them one becomes conscious of their fine literary style — the style of the two beautiful autobiographical volumes James wrote shortly before his death — of the charmed sense of the past they evoke, even as re-reading his own works had evoked it for James. We are not concerned here with deciding whether James often applied later theories to earlier works, written before the theories had been formulated. I have taken them as they stand, the analysis by an ageing artist, of his working methods. There were many people, Edmund Gosse tells us (1) (Howells was one of these) who expected intimate revelations in the prefaces, a wealth of autobiographical material. Nothing could have been further removed from James's ideal. He chose the occasion to reveal the secrets of his craft, *that* constituted autobiographical material enough... But he revealed more.

He revealed more — he revealed his whole attitude towards life — the attitude of the indefatigable observer and note-taker, of the imaginative, creative artist. He rambled on, talking of life in general, expressing a complete faith in art — it was absolute for him — urging the need for saturation while objecting to the saturation methods of Wells and Bennett where imagination and se

1. Edmund Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*.

lection were not sufficiently called upon ; urging the need for severe principles of economy... He had learned, indeed, their extraordinary value.

James's early years, with their hesitations and indecisions and quiet, painstaking labour, had led him to the essay on the *Art of Fiction*. By that time he had reached his own ground, had shaken off Balzac and George Eliot, and the influence of Hawthorne — or rather had assimilated them. Once assimilated they took their places in the background of his art. In his prefaces he seldom invokes them or any other authority. Occasionally the name of Balzac comes up ; more often the name of Turgenev. George Eliot is given passing reference ...James wrote the prefaces completely independent of his predecessors. Life was such and such, art such and such, and the practice of the craft of fiction such and such... From the *Art of Fiction* to the prefaces we proceed in a straight line — over a period of thirty years of ripe, fruitful endeavour.

In all English and American literature there is no greater example of devotion to art, no individual whose life was as closely allied to his creative work... James left the novel magnificently enriched. They rightly call him the « novelist's novelist ».

Vu, le 16 juin 1931.
Le Doyen de la Faculté des Lettres
de l'Université de Paris

H. DELACROIX.

Vu et permis d'imprimer :
Le Recteur de l'Académie de Paris,
CHARLÉTY

Appendix

A Letter from Henry James to Mrs Linton (1).

3 Bolton st. w.
June 20th. [1881-82 ?]

Dear Mrs Linton,

You certainly write better than I when it is a question of writing eulogies. Let me thank you for this bunch of flowers which I have been inhaling with infinite satisfaction. I greatly value your judgment of my books, for you judge as one who knows and understands. So much the better for me if you are so pleased.

You won't be particularly, by the way, with *Washington Square* : it is the poorest thing I have done being monotonous and meagre. But I recommend you with more confidence the two shorter tales that are bound with it (2).

There is a hideous misprint in some volumes of the *Portrait* (3), which I hope you won't discover. I hope indeed that they have sent you a corrected copy. I wish you rest and courage. But you have the latter — and courage *is* rest.

Very faithfully and gratefully yours,

H. JAMES.

1. The original is in the possession of Mr Paul Lemperly, Lakewood, Ohio, and it is with his permission, and that of Mr Henry James, nephew of the novelist, that it is here published.

2. *Washington Square*, *The Pension Beaurepas*, *A Bundle of Letters*. London, 1881.

3. Concerning this misprint Mr Lemperly, who has for years been a James collector, writes : « I (as well as others) have so far been unable to identify any such copies... if discovered and the nature... of such a misprint were disclosed it would be hailed as an outstanding James bibliographical event. »

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